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ABSTRACT

In 1974, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia created the developmental studies program in response to a growing number of entering freshmen who were inadequately prepared for curricula assuming mastery of the basic skills. Early attempts to evaluate developmental programs in Georgia simply used standard survey techniques to discover the range of procedures, criteria, and designs, including the sorts of program evaluations each institution used. The first quarterly report was mailed to each institution in 1974, and was designed to provide information about the population served by the developmental program and whether the program was working. In 1975, questions were devised to measure the success of developmental studies students in subsequent coursework. Each institution was asked to compare the success rates and grade point averages of former developmental studies students and regularly placed freshmen in English, mathematics, and social science classes. Across the 33 institutions in the state, the entire developmental studies program is apparently working well, with 50 to 60% of the students completing their work and moving into freshman credit courses. (HTH)

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EVALUATING DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH PROGRAMS IN GEORGIA

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EVALUATING DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH PROGRAMS

IN GEORGIA

In 1973, Mina Shaughnessy wrote that "the debate about Open Admissions has been and is being carried on in the language of those who oppose it: in the alphabet of numbers, the syntax of print-outs, the transformations of graphs and tables." She urged teachers of Basic Writing to commit themselves to extending their accountability to adopt the techniques of evaluation and close, systematic observation of the social sciences, to pool research. "Until we can describe more precisely than we have the process whereby our students move toward maturity as readers and writers, we cannot challenge those critics who claim that the students do not move at all."[1]

Developmental English courses, like the developmental studies programs in which they are often embedded, have been the subjects of many evaluation studies, often designed to measure the effectiveness of various program designs. Just as frequently, these studies have been intended to answer critics of developmental studies, ranging from attacks like Geoffrey Wagner's, who argued that developmental education was a threat to the real purpose of colleges, to the more recent charge that developmental education does not serve the very minority students in whose support it was originally called into existence.[2]

There are real restrictions on these evaluations, however.

Since these evaluations are usually performed for or by administrators at particular schools, they must be subject to the calendar by which decisions are made. The problem investigated is generally a pre-established concern of the audience for the evaluation, and thus the evaluation must be relevant to current administrative concerns and comprehensible for administrators. Generally, this argues against scientific rigor and technical sophistication. When issues of program installation, expansion, modification, or termination are concerned, research design tends to become secondary.[3] Developmental programs "are dealing with human beings, not laboratory animals, and in many instances, the type of controls necessary for valid research are simply inappropriate." This is, in fact, a moral issue. "Is it fair to deny a high-risk student access to an experimental program simply because his/her number was not randomly selected by a computer?"[4]

In fact, studies using rigorous research designs have tended to focus on very narrow aspects of program design, such as the effect of career counseling on disadvantaged students, and the results have been mixed. Ferrin reports, as do Pedrini, Brown and Ervin, that remedial coursework does improve the retention and performance of disadvantaged students. But just as many of these narrow studies report exactly the opposite: an early article by Wilkerson--one example among many--reports that there is little evidence that students are well-served by developmental curricula.[5]

The Developmental Studies Program in Georgia has a statewide evaluation system that has proven effective and simple. No curriculum in the state is more thoroughly evaluated. Because of the controversy attendant upon placing remedial programs in the state colleges and because the Developmental Studies Program was mandated by the University System's governing body, the Board of Regents, over some protest, this curriculum has, from its beginning, been forced to prove to its critics that it deserved support with state funds.

In 1974, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia created the statewide Developmental Studies Program in response to a growing percentage of entering freshmen who were insufficiently prepared for curricula assuming the mastery of basic skills. The Developmental Studies Program is designed to meet these students' needs and to ensure that every graduate of a high school in Georgia, particularly students who may in the past not have been well-served by post-secondary education, could have the maximum chance to succeed in college.

All entering freshmen who score low on the SAT must take the Basic Skills Examination, a competency test in mathematics, English, and reading developed by University System faculty. If BSE scores indicate weakness in any of the three areas, the student must enroll in the appropriate developmental course within the Developmental Studies Department. A student cannot take freshman courses involving mathematics, English, or reading until successfully completing developmental courses as prescribed

by BSE scores. By the end of the freshman year, the student must have improved scores on a re-test (the BSE plus a writing sample, for instance) to remain enrolled at the institution.

Each institution has developed its own entrance and exit criteria as well as its own curricula; the schools are free to meet the challenge of increasing the success and retention of non-traditional students in their own fashion, as long as the criteria do not fall below statewide minimum scores. The program is administered at the University System level by an advisory committee with representation from all 33 state institutions, and by a Director of Developmental Studies.[6]

Within these limits there is considerable variation in system-wide developmental English classes, for example: some schools offer only one developmental English class, while others offer two; schools supplement the in-class offerings with peer-tutorial labs, audio-visual centers, computer aided instruction; mastery learning, contract learning, and fairly traditional classroom teaching all exist side by side. But two things at least remain constant: the use of the BSE, which is an error-recognition to test English skills, as a post-test requires considerable instruction in grammar, and all students in developmental English classes must submit an acceptable writing sample, however the faculty of a particular institution teach or design their class.

Before 1968, there was little evaluation being performed in developmental studies. John Rouche's periodic surveys of

developmental programs have since discovered more and more schools developing procedures for evaluating curricula; in his 1977 study, more than a third of the colleges indicated that they regularly evaluated both the outcome and the design of their developmental programs. He found that "the most successful developmental education programs are generally those that evaluate themselves and use a number of indices on which to evaluate those efforts" though "few" programs use a "control or contrast group."[7] The advisory committee that designed the statewide developmental studies program for Georgia sought out models of program design and of program evaluation. Happily, Rouche's surveys and the examples of "compensatory education" at black colleges, which had long histories of commitment to developmental studies, provided some useful models.

Early attempts to evaluate the developmental studies program in Georgia simply used standard survey procedure to discover the range of procedures, criteria, and design, including the sorts of program evaluations being used, at system institutions.

In December of 1974, the first quarterly report was mailed to each institution. It was designed to provide information about the population served by the developmental program at each institution and whether the program aided in retention of these students.

But of course, the most important questions to be asked of any program, though, are "Does it work?" and "How will we know if it is working?" To measure the effects of the curriculum

directly, the first report asked these questions, which have since appeared on every version of the report:

1. Of the students required to enroll in Special Studies math, how many exited mathematics?
2. Of the students required to enroll in Special Studies reading, how many exited reading?
3. Of the students required to enroll in Special Studies English, how many exited English?
4. How many students required to take Special Studies completed their final Special Studies requirement(s)?

Answers to these questions were further classified by student ethnic identification. The answers to these questions tell an evaluator about student success, whether a student is meeting the requirements of the curriculum, but they do not tell the evaluator whether the curriculum is meeting the requirements of the student. Student success in a given curriculum does not necessarily indicate whether the curriculum is too simple, too difficult, or simply irrelevant. The focus of the report form had to be changed to meet this criticism and thus make the instrument more valid.

Remedial or developmental programs are designed to prepare students for the freshman curriculum and it is there, in subsequent study, that the question "How will we know the program works?" will be answered. Andrew Hill has argued that study of developmental program effectiveness should not be so concerned with the persistence and success of students in the remedial programs themselves. "The central issue in any study of developmental education would seem to be how well developmental program students are prepared to tackle college-level

work, not how well they achieve or persist at the remedial level."[8]

In Fall of 1975, questions were devised to measure the success of Developmental Studies students in subsequent study. At first on an annual basis, each institution was asked to compare the success rates and grade point averages of ex-Developmental Studies students and regularly placed freshmen in English, mathematics, and social science classes. Once each institution had developed computer programs or other methods of discovering these data, this annual comparison became a regular feature of the quarterly report form:

1. Of the former Developmental English students who took college level English courses, how many were successful in the courses?

The question was repeated for each area of the curriculum and again asked for ethnic classifications. As the question evolved from an annual question to a quarterly question, the issue of grade point averages was dropped. These are not two randomly selected comparison groups; obviously the regularly placed freshmen would be expected to have higher averages, and they do. But the success rates of both groups are absolutely vital information; it is by comparing the two groups--random or not--that we discover whether "the program works."

Across the 33 institutions of the University System of Georgia, the entire Developmental Studies Program is apparently working well--in fact, much better than was originally anticipated. According to Dr. Charles Nash, a former Director, only 8 percent

of Developmental Studies students fail to complete their courses, while the average attrition for other courses across the system is 10 percent. 50-60 percent of the students in Developmental Studies courses complete this work and move into freshman credit courses, with 21 percent able to do this within one quarter and 65 percent able to complete all developmental requirements within a year.[9]

Developmental English courses, however, apparently pose the most difficulty for minority students. As the figures in Table 1 show, black students do not exit the developmental English classes in as high a percentage as other students do. And, once in regular freshman English classes, a lower percentage of black students pass than the passing percentage of other students. Both groups of ex-developmental English students have more difficulty with freshman English classes than do regular-placement students.

The evaluator must remember though, particularly when interpreting the results of evaluations not based on a rigorous research design, that "the end result of the evaluation must be program development."[10] In other words, program evaluation, not student evaluation, must be all that is attempted. If, in fact, students are not performing as expected, one cannot, in the absence of random or matched control groups, blame the students. One must look for the weakness in the program itself.

And constant program development, always with the difficulties of minority students in mind, is helping make the

courses more responsive to the needs of minority students, slowly if surely. A glance at the data in Table 1, or at the summarized data in Table 2 where quarter to quarter fluctuations are averaged out, shows that our programs of faculty development, closer attention to textbook selection, reliance upon minority advisors and other measures have helped narrow the gap between minority and other students. The trend in both tables is toward better performance for both groups of students.

One school in the system, Georgia Southern College, has been able to use the control group method to evaluate its developmental English classes, since an increased standard for admissions made it possible to study the success of two groups of students with comparable SAT scores, one group of whom passed through the developmental English classes, the other group of whom did not. Of the students who were not required to take developmental English classes, 52.7% passed the regular freshman English class on the first attempt, compared to a 72.6% rate among the students who had taken developmental English first. The 20% difference is strong evidence that the program makes a difference in the chances of the underprepared student.[11]

The Developmental Studies Program has clearly increased the chances for success of many minority students. Figures in Tables 4 and 5 show that since the inception of the program, system enrollment of minority students has increased. In addition, these students now persist in their enrollment in

larger numbers than before. Table 5 indicates that the numbers of minority students in each enrollment category are quite stable from quarter to quarter, indicating good retention and persistence. While many other factors, such as increased recruiting and financial aid, have of course helped bring about this change in student population, Developmental Studies has no doubt played a major role.

And of course it need not be surprising that developmental studies students lag at least slightly behind regular placement students in achievement. The two groups are not equal, and the latter group may set an impossibly high benchmark for comparison, though certainly one that should be our standard to strive toward. The results from Georgia compare favorably with those reported from other states using similar evaluation methods. For example, in Statewide Assessment of Developmental/Remedial Education at Maryland Community Colleges, Dorothy S. Linthicum reported that of students who successfully completed developmental English courses, 53% completed a college level English class with a passing grade, while over 96% of a control group of regular placement students passed their first college English course. Seventy-five percent of the former developmental English students made C or better in their college English course, compared to 91% of the regular placement students. Though precise figures were not provided, Linthicum reports that white students tended to make higher grades.[12] The results are similar from a study of the Queensborough Community College program:

In most of the introductory courses during the 2 years of the study, a higher percentage of A and B grades was achieved by the non-basic skills student than the percentage of the A and B grades received by the former basic skills students (7.9% and 29.7% as opposed to 2.9% and 18.1%) while the total percentage of passing grades for former basic skills students showed an increase from 64.6% to 68.5% over the 2 years.[13]

Thus, the evaluation of the Georgia developmental English curricula shows quite respectable results, though there is certainly still room for improvement. (The passing percentages shown in evaluation of the program's reading and mathematics curricula are much higher, and the gaps indicated there between black students and other students and between developmental and non-developmental students are correspondingly smaller). And importantly, the findings of these reports and studies are being used when consideration is given to changes in placement, curriculum, or testing policies, because these results are couched in terms easily comprehensible. And equally importantly, this inductive evaluation provides a longitudinal base line for our programs, against which further refinements of curriculum can be measured.

Table 1

Quarterly Averages of Passing Rates in Developmental English at Augusta College (C or Better)

Quarter	Black Students	Other Students
Winter 1975	25	45.7
Spring 1975	38	45.7
Summer 1975	21	44.7
Fall 1975	28	40
Spring 1976	33	18
Summer 1976	50	68
Fall 1976	43.75	71
Winter 1976	37	76
Spring 1977	40	60
Summer 1977	60 (57)*	68 (68)
Fall 1977	53.75	61
Winter 1978	39.5	62
Spring 1978	28.5	58
Summer 1978	33 (49)	69 (73)
Fall 1978	36.5	63.6
Winter 1979	36.5	59
Spring 1979	25 (26.4)	41 (35.7)
Summer 1979	47.8	69.4
Fall 1979	39.5	70.5
Winter 1980	47	65
Spring 1980	50	50
Summer 1980	33.3	64
Fall 1980	52	70
Winter 1981	44	64

All figures represent percentages of the total developmental English enrollment within each classification.

*Figures to the right of the columns, in parentheses, are averages of the figures from the entire University System of Georgia.

Table 2

Yearly Averages of Passing Rates in Developmental English at Augusta College (C or Better)

Year	Black Students	Other Students
1975-1976	37%	42%
1976-1977	45%	69%
1977-1978	39%	62%
1978-1979	37%	58%
1979-1980	43%	62%
1980-1981	48%	67%

Table 3

Percentages of Students Passing Freshman English
at Augusta College (C or Better)

Quarter	Black Former Developmental Students	Other Former Developmental Students	All Students
Spring 1975*		36	60
Spring 1976*		46 (48)	72 (72)
Fall 1978	28.9	39.3	68.2
Winter 1979	24	41	64
Spring 1979	16	47	78
Summer 1979	25	61.5	73
Fall 1979	26	44	68
Winter 1980	37	42	56
Spring 1980	54	52	61
Summer 1980	21	49	53
Fall 1980	53	58	73
Winter 1981	44	45	70

*For Spring 1975 and 1976, no ethnic classification was requested; the figures in parentheses are University System of Georgia averages, and were available only for this quarter.

Table 4

Augusta College Enrollment

Quarter	Total Enrollment	Black Enrollment	Black Percentage
Fall 1973	3484	218	6.2
Winter 1974	3458	310	8.9
Spring 1974	3268	319	9.7
Summer 1974	2025	272	13.4
Fall 1974	3585	369	10.2
Winter 1975	3520	372	10.5
Spring 1975	3393	388	11.4
Summer 1975	2170	304	14
Fall 1975	3727	438	11.7
Winter 1976	3668	406	11
Spring 1976	3440	428	12.4
Summer 1976	2135	339	15.8
Fall 1976	3647	447	12.2
Winter 1977	3638	467	12.8
Spring 1977	3460	478	13.8
Summer 1977	2101	363	17.2
Fall 1977	3883	524	13.4
Winter 1978	3704	518	13.9
Spring 1978	3510	511	14.5
Summer 1978	2012	334	16.6
Fall 1978	3692	503	13.6
Winter 1979	3597	498	13.8
Spring 1979	3429	477	13.9
Summer 1979	2067	380	18.3
Fall 1979	3702	487	13.1
Winter 1980	3628	500	13.7
Spring 1980	3345	458	13.6
Summer 1980	2029	348	17.1
Fall 1980	3739	517	13.8
Winter 1981	3825	534	13.9
Spring 1981	3619	502	13.8
Summer 1981	2042	338	16.5

Table 5

Black Student Enrollment at Augusta College by Class

Quarter	Fr	So	Jr	Sr	Gr	Developmental Studies	* Total
Fall 1978	124	78	85	51	23	106	503
Winter 1979	108	84	85	58	20	99	498
Spring 1979	88	86	78	66	23	93	477
Summer 1979	28	50	55	62	32	42	380
Fall 1979	79	74	78	61	23	133	487
Winter 1980	79	78	69	71	19	123	500
Spring 1980	89	72	61	67	20	102	458
Summer 1980	33	46	49	45	21	45	348
Fall 1980	101	81	54	60	30	132	517
Winter 1981	105	77	70	69	27	95	534
Spring 1981	100	77	58	70	24	80	502
Summer 1981	41	49	36	47	28	29	338

*Total includes a small number of transient students from other institutions, who are not otherwise classified.

NOTES

[1]"Open Admissions and the Disadvantaged Teacher," College Composition and Communication, 24 (December, 1973), 401-404.

[2]"On Remediation," College English, October 1976, pp. 153-158. Typical of more recent criticism is David E. Lavin, Richard D. Alba, Richard A. Silberstein, Right Versus Privilege (New York: Free Press, 1981).

[3]Samuel Ball, "Research and Program Evaluation: Some Principles, Precepts, and Practices," The Final Report of National Project II, Alternatives to the Revolving Door (New York: Bronx Community College, n.d.).

[4]Andrew Hill, "Developmental Education: Does It Work?" Community College Review, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1978), p. 43.

[5]Ferrin, R. I. "Developmental Programs in Midwestern Community Colleges," College Entrance Examination Board Higher Education Surveys, 1971. Pedrini, D. T. and Pedrini, B. C. "Assessment and Prediction of Grade Point and/or Attrition/Persistence for Disadvantaged and Regular College Freshmen," College Student Journal, 1976, pp. 260-264. Brown, S. E. and Ervin, Leroy, "A Multivariate Analysis of A Special Studies Program," College Student Journal, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 379-381. Wilkerson, D. "Compensatory Practices in Colleges and Universities," Information Retrieval Center on the Disadvantaged Bulletin, ERIC 011908.

[6]For this description of the program in which I work I am indebted to Paul Marion, "Basic Skills Competency Testing Programs in Multi-Campus Systems," Journal of Developmental and Remedial Education, Winter 1980, pp. 26-27 and Cynthia L. Davis, "Developmental Education in Georgia: A Statewide Program," Journal of Developmental and Remedial Education, Winter 1979, pp. 2-4, 26.

[7]John E. Roueche and Jerry J. Snow, Overcoming Learning Problems (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), p. 107.

[8]Hill, p. 44.

[9]Charles R. Nash, "A Description and Evaluation of the Georgia Special Studies Program," a paper presented to the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group on Community College Research, New Orleans, July, 1977.

[10]James M. Deem, "Needed: Systematic Evaluation of College Remedial Reading Programs," ERIC 163410.

[11]Letter from Professor Barbara Bitter, 3 September 1981, (See Appendix for Data).

[12]ERIC No. ED 175514.

[13]Irwin Bergman and Robert Grace. "A Follow-Up Study: How Do Basic Skills Students Compare with Non-Basic Skills Students in Some of Their Subsequent College Courses?" ERIC ED 135435 JC 770164, p. 9.

APPENDIX

English 151 as of Winter Quarter, 1981*

	Fall, 1978 - Entered as Regular Student and took English 151					Fall, 1979 - Entered as Special Studies, exited English 99 and took English 151				
	A	B	C	D	Line Total	A	B	C	D	Total
Passed 151 First Attempt	0	18	81	63	162	2	16	59	32	109
% - line total	0	11.1	50	38.8		1.8	14.6	54.1	29.3	
% - column "					52.7					72.6
Dropped 151 then passed	0	3	10	8	21	0	0	2	1	3
% - line total	0	14.2	47.6	38				66.6	33.4	
% - column "					6.8					2.0
Failed 151 then passed	0	2	18	9	29	0	0	0	6	6
% - line total	0	6.8	62	3.1					100	
% - column "					9.4					4.0
Passed on Third Attempt	0	0	4	6	10					
% - line total	0	0	40	60						
% - column "					3.2					
Took 151 Never passed	0	0	0	0	85					32
% - column total					27.6					21.3
Column total					307					150

Comparison of Totals

	1978	1979
Number eventually passing 151	222	118
% - total class	58.2	47.7
Number not passing 151	85	32
% - total class	22.3	12.9
Number never taking 151	74	77**
% - total class	19.4	31.1
Not in English 99 but took English 151		20
% - total class		8
TOTAL ENTERING CLASS	381	247

Special Studies students not in English 99, but took English 151

	Number
A	0
B	1
C	12
D	3
F	4
TOTAL	20

**46 never exited English 99
31 exited but did not take English 151

*Initial study of students with comparable SAT scores and PFAG. New admissions criteria placed the 1979 group in Special Studies.